The Agricultural Land Reserve:

Protecting B.C.'s Farmland

Why preserve Agricultural Land?

Agriculture is an important industry in British Columbia, yet each year we import over 50% of our food. As world populations continue to increase, however, our present food suppliers may have less surplus for export and the price of these foods will be considerably higher. At some time in the future, we in British Columbia may have to grow more of our own food. The question is, will we still have that option?

When it comes to natural resources, British Columbia is usually considered a province of plenty. In terms of an agricultural land resource, however, we are not well endowed. British Columbia has such complex topography and varied climates that only rarely do soil, climate, slope and drainage occur in a combination that is ideal for agriculture. In fact, of our total land area, only about 5% has a combination of land and climate characteristics that will allow cultivation of agricultural crops.

Unfortunately, the same lands that are suitable for agriculture in British Columbia are also in great demand for other land uses. Some of these competing uses, such as forestry, wildlife and certain types of recreation, do not permanently damage the future ability of the land to grow food. Other uses, however, are irreversible. Houses, shopping centers, highways and factories have already taken thousands of acres of our best farmland, and these acres are lost to agriculture forever.

If we in British Columbia want to retain the option to grow our own food, we must preserve what remains of our limited agricultural land resource.

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ALCA *The Agricultural Land Commission Act was passed by the Provincial Legislature to preserve agricultural land for present and future farm use.*

ALC *The Agricultural Land Commission comprises five or more members, appointed by Cabinet to administer the Agricultural Land Commission Act.*

ALR *The Agricultural Land Reserve is the provincial zone established to protect agricultural land.*

The Agricultural Land Reserve (ALR) in British Columbia covers approximately 11.6 million acres. ALR land occurs in every Regional District and includes both private and Crown-owned land and forested, farmed and vacant land. Some ALR units are vast tracts of many thousands of acres, as in the Peace River area; others are small pockets of only a few tens of acres, as in the Gulf Islands. In total, the Agricultural Land Reserve comprises those lands within the province that have the physical capability to grow food.

The Agricultural Land Reserve is regarded as a relatively stable zone. Within the ALR, subdivision and use of lands are restricted by Regulations under the Agricultural Land Commission Act. Local and regional governments, as well as other provincial agencies, are expected to plan in accordance with the provincial policy of preserving agricultural land. The Agricultural Land Reserve takes precedence over, but does not replace, other legislation and bylaws that may apply to the land.

Agricultural Land is...

The Agricultural Land Reserve is based upon the lands' potential for agricultural use, rather than its present use or parcel size. In order to determine which lands in the province have this potential, the Agricultural Land Commission used the land capability information collected as part of the Canada Land Inventory (CLI) program. Under this federal-provincial program, and over a period of about 10 years, land capability for agriculture maps were prepared for most areas throughout British Columbia.

The Canada Land Inventory classification system for agriculture rates land from Class 1 to Class 7, depending upon the range of crops that can be grown. The agricultural capability ratings are obtained from basic soil and climate information and involve both aerial photo interpretation and extensive field work by soil scientists.

Under the Canada Land Inventory system, lands that have the ideal combination of soil, climate, slope and drainage to grow the widest range of agricultural crops are rated Class 1. (Less than ½ of 1% of British Columbia is Class 1 agricultural land.) As minor limitations to agriculture occur, such as rolling topography or a shorter growing season, certain crops can no longer be grown successfully and the land is then rated Class 2 or Class 3.

Lands that are rated Class 4, 5 or 6 indicate a progressively narrower range of crops as the physical limitations to agricultural use of the land become more restrictive. Areas that have no capability for agriculture whatsoever, such as rock outcrops or very steep bluffs, are rated Class 7.

CANADA LAND INVENTORY AGRICULTURAL CAPABILITY CLASSIFICATION FOR BRITISH COLUMBIA*

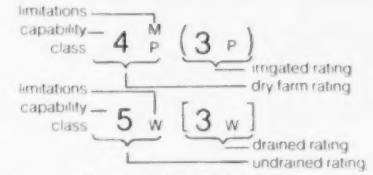
Agricultural Capability classes indicate the relative *range* of crops that can be grown.

Class 1 — widest range of crops, including vegetables, cereal grains, berry fruits, specialty crops and forages
Class 2
Class 3
Class 4 — reduced range of vegetables, cereal grains and berry fruits, plus forages
Class 5 — cultivated forages and permanent pasture plus selected specialty crops
Class 6 — natural rangeland suitable for grazing
Class 7 — not capable of agricultural use

Subclasses indicate the specific soil or climate *limitations* that reduce the range of crops that can be grown.

C — climate
D — restricted rooting and/or difficult tillage
E — soil erosion
F — soil fertility
I — flooding hazard
M — moisture deficiency
N — salts
P — stoniness
R — bedrock
T — topography
W — wetness
S, X — combination of soil factors

Dual ratings indicate where irrigation or drainage would increase the range of crops that could be grown.



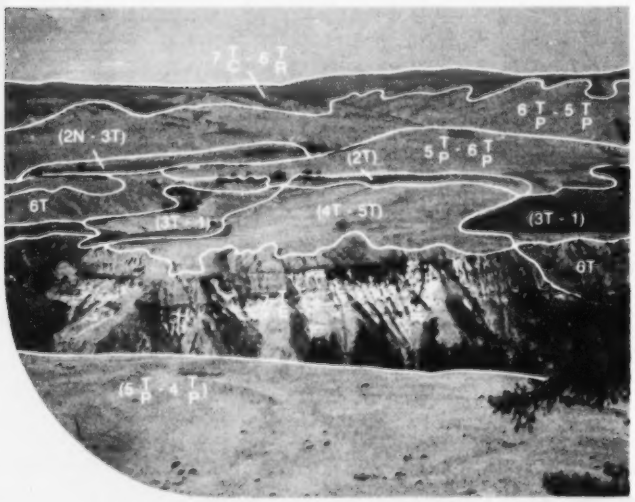
*For a more complete description of the agricultural land capability classification system see, Methodology *Land Capability for Agriculture* B.C. Land Inventory (CLI), Kelowna, 1973 and *The Canada Land Inventory*, Soil Capability Classification for Agriculture, Report No. 2, 1972

the Agricultural Land Reserve

Like its landscape and its climate, British Columbia's agriculture varies greatly from region to region. As a general guideline, Canada Land Inventory Class 1-4 lands are regarded as the key agricultural lands of the province and are included within the provincial Agricultural Land Reserve. In addition, in certain regions of the province, especially where ranching, dairying or mixed farming is the most characteristic type of agriculture, Class 5 forage lands and Class 6 spring and fall grazing lands are also included within the Agricultural Land Reserve.

Under the CLI Class 1-7 system, a lower capability class is not necessarily synonymous with lower quality agricultural land and, in a regional sense, certain lands may have a special importance to agriculture because they are well suited to a specific crop. For example, in west central British Columbia, because of the short growing season, many of the lands are rated Class 5, suitable only for forage production. The soils are excellent, however, and these Class 5 forage lands are an integral part of beef farming in that area. In the southern Interior, it is the natural grasslands that are important to the ranching industry, even though most of these lands are rated Class 6 under the Canada Land Inventory system.

In drawing the Agricultural Land Reserve boundary, therefore, the Commission used as its main criterion agricultural capability as defined under the CLI program, but also took into consideration the special importance of certain lands to the agriculture of the region. Minor areas of non-agricultural land, such as small rock outcrops, gullies and escarpments, may also occur within the ALR where the available scale of mapping does not allow their delineation or where intensive non-agricultural use of such lands would conflict with farm use of surrounding better capability lands.



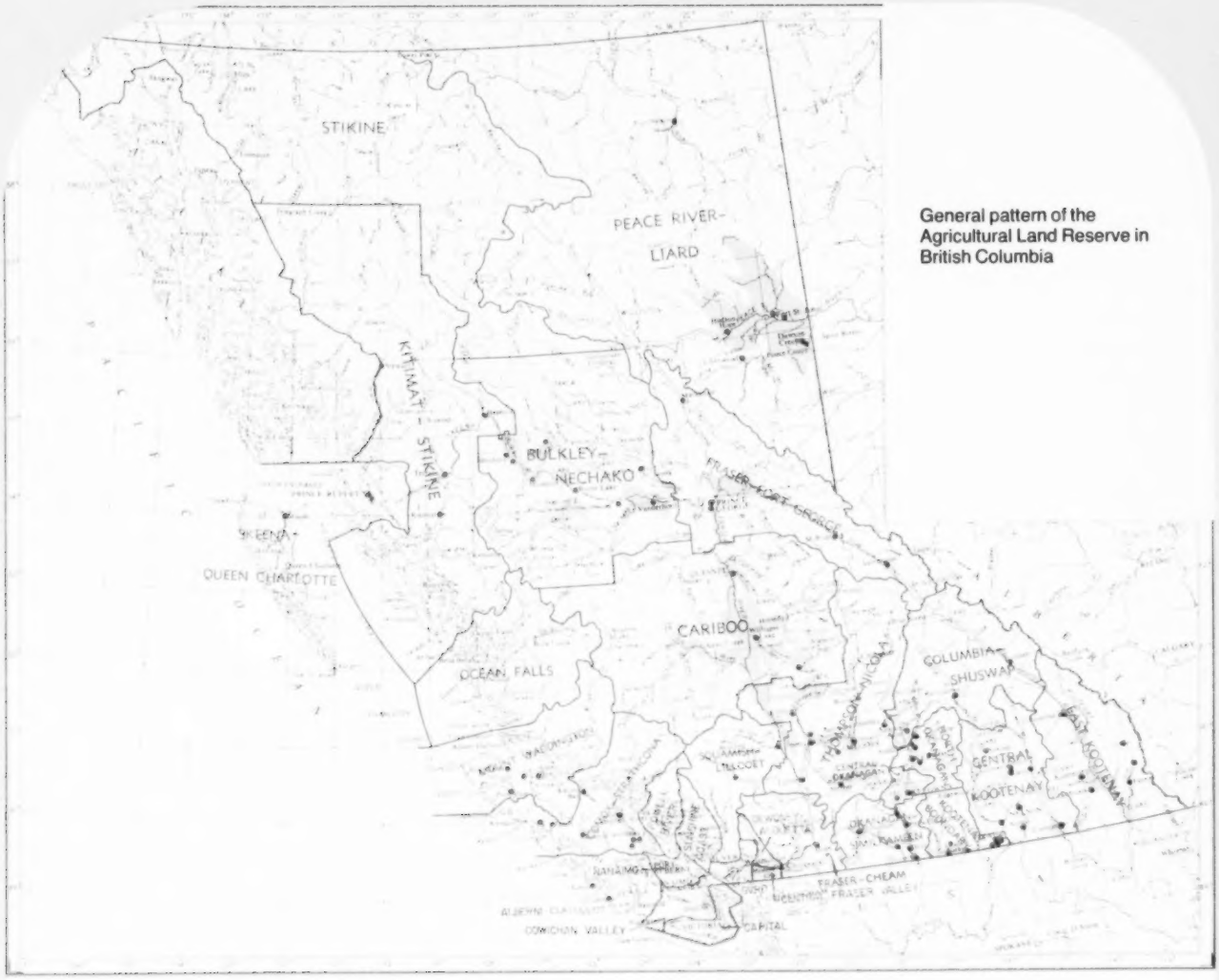
Agriculture is also the Farmer

Preservation of the agricultural land resource is a first and very important step toward protecting British Columbia's food-producing options for the future. The land resource is basic to agriculture, but also important is the farmer who husbands that land, the economic conditions under which agriculture must operate, and the expectations of the rest of the population, both as neighbours and consumers.

Each type of agriculture has its own requirements, not only in terms of the amount and kind of land required, but also in terms of support services, such as packing, processing, transportation and marketing facilities. Without these services to back up the efforts of the farmer to produce food, agriculture cannot thrive.

There are also other factors that can undermine the efforts of the farmer, disrupt the farm community and, therefore, endanger the health of the agricultural industry. Within the rural community, for example, conflicts can develop between those who are actively farming the land and those non-farm residents who have moved to the area, attracted by the rural setting. On a broader scale, land use decisions by government and private industry — whether they involve transportation corridors across farmlands, taxation policies or major resource development projects — can work against the efficient farm use of land within the Agricultural Land Reserve.

The Agricultural Land Commission views all of these concerns as part of the task of preserving agricultural land in the long term. If steps are not taken to protect the farmer and strengthen the farm community, then saving the land will not be enough, and British Columbia's agricultural industry will not survive.



General pattern of the Agricultural Land Reserve in British Columbia

Agricultural Land Reserve Plans are available by N.T.S. map number for each Regional District from:

Director
Surveys and Mapping Branch
Ministry of Environment
Parliament Buildings
Victoria, B.C.
V8V 1X5

Attention: Map and Air Photo Sales Office
Telephone: 387-3174

or from the appropriate Regional District office

Methodology
Land Capability for Agriculture
B.C. Land Inventory (CLI)

The Canada Land Inventory Soil Capability Classification for Agriculture Report No. 2 and CLI Agricultural Capability Maps by N.T.S. map number are available from:

Librarian
Resource Analysis Branch
Ministry of Environment
Parliament Buildings
Victoria, B.C. V8V 1X4
Telephone: 387-6995

Did You Know That...

- *although agriculture is continually expanding in British Columbia, we still produce less than one-half of our own food?*
- *of the 236,810,000 acres comprising the province of British Columbia, only 11,664,000 acres or 4.9% of the land area is within the Agricultural Land Reserve?*
- *the Agricultural Land Reserve includes agricultural lands regardless of ownership or tenure, and that government ministries and provincial Crown corporations are subject to the same regulations under the Agricultural Land Commission Act as individual land-owners?*

Credits: prepared for the Provincial Agricultural Land Commission by J.M. Sawicki. Photos by G.G. Runka.

General Enquiries may be directed to:

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4333 Ledger Avenue
Burnaby, B.C. V5G 3T3
Telephone: 294-5211

Enquiries regarding application procedures under the Agricultural Land Commission Act should be directed to the appropriate Regional District office.

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